

Recruiting and Retention

Finding, and most importantly KEEPING members is critical to the success and survival of a unit. Listed below are techniques and advice which have worked for other CAP units. These things have helped them get members and keep members.

Recruiting

1. Obtain posters from HQ CAP Marketing & Public Relations. Get permission to display the posters in prominent locations (schools, businesses, airports, etc.).
2. List the unit phone number in the phone book, including the Yellow Pages and under emergency numbers. Many units have made arrangements to have CAP listed in the emergency section under "search and rescue." The business pages are another good option.
3. Return phone calls! If a message is left by a member or potential member -- call the person back. National Headquarters is routinely called (long distance) by people who are eager to join or find out information about CAP, but have not received a call back from a message left on a unit commander's answering machine. This is also a frequent comment from members leaving CAP. They did not feel the commander cared anything about them because they were never called back.
4. Organize a recruiting drive. Beat the bushes! Give prizes to the cadet and senior member bringing in the most new members. Good sources/locations are schools, air shows, local Guard and Reserve units, and emergency service providers such as firefighters, policemen, and emergency medical technicians.
5. Set up recruiting booths at local events, particularly if they are aviation or aerospace oriented. Local air shows are always a big draw and a valuable source of potential members.
6. Get on the Internet. Many units with computers have web pages that provide avenues for prospects to contact the unit. With our free Wing web page, this is an incredibly valuable asset. If your unit doesn't have a web page, our webmaster can help your unit develop one. Please feel free to contact him via e-mail.

Retention

Retention simply means keeping the people you recruit. CAP is not a cheap organization to belong to and members will renew and pay their dues again only if they are satisfied and feel that they have received value throughout the year. Your members will base their perceptions of value on their interaction with the leaders and other members of your unit, and the opportunities your unit provides. If you lose a member, you must recruit two new members to grow. However, if you keep a member, you only have to recruit one to grow. Here are some tips on how to keep your members.

1. ACTIVITIES, ACTIVITIES, ACTIVITIES!! Lack of activity or training is one of the most frequently cited reasons for leaving CAP. Try to have an 'event' at least every six weeks. It can be anything: a Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX), and Aerospace Education workshop, a day dedicated to getting as many cadets in the air on orientation flights as possible followed by a barbecue, or a bowling/pizza party (very good for morale and cohesiveness building).
2. COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE! No one wants to be kept in the dark (the mushroom principle). Post the wing calendar (if there's not one, make one).

Let them know what's going on. Talk to your wing commander regularly and pass on to your squadron what was said about upcoming events.

3. PLAN, PLAN, PLAN. A meeting conducted with last-minute planning looks like it has been planned at the last minute. It shows a lack of respect to members and the time and money they have spent to be in CAP. Unplanned meetings are BORING -- and people quit!

4. Set the example. Haircut, uniform, insignias sewn on properly, boots shined -- all according to the 'book' (CAPR 39-1). Otherwise, how can you expect members to do the same.

5. Award all decorations as soon as they are earned... and make a big deal out of it! Doing so encourages others to achieve the same. Take lots of pictures. Post some on the bulletin board or scrapbook and give copies to the member.

6. Make a big deal out of promotions! (see #5 above)

7. Always do what you say you will do when you say you will do it. If you can't, explain why you cannot as soon as possible. Don't assume the members know why. Personal contact is the key to retention.

8. Require adherence to customs and courtesies. Many cadets are attracted to CAP because of the "military" ambiance and a desire for the structure and discipline CAP offers. They also want the responsibility and the chance to prove that they "can do" and do it well. CAP offers young people the opportunity to be trained in CPR, First Aid, navigation (day and night), crash site procedures, radio communications, traffic control, close order drill, direction finding for Emergency Locator Transmitters, and lots more. These people are proud of their accomplishments and want to be recognized through these accomplishments in a society that may see them simply as 'teenagers' and all that implies.

9. Appreciate them for what they are! Cadets (and Seniors) come in all shapes and sizes, all colors and backgrounds, rich and poor, good solid families and some not so good. Some may be obnoxious, but they too have the potential to achieve. Many cadets come from single family homes and need the gap filled in with someone they can trust who respects them.

10. Make sure they know they are appreciated! Don't let a good member "burn out" -- a simple slap on the back, a "Job well done," or Commander's Commendation can keep a member on the verge of quitting from taking that final step.

11. Give every new member something to do -- RIGHT AWAY!! Most of them come to us asking (or at least thinking) "What can I do to help?" Keep handy a "to do" list of things a newcomer can do. If the newcomer doesn't feel needed or welcome, he or she won't come back. Have new members schedule guests for safety meetings as well as think up topics of discussion. The logistics alone will keep them busy.

12. Be sure and GREET the new arrival who slips in the door at your meeting. He or she doesn't know a soul in the place. Have a visitor sign-in sheet at the front door. Post GREETERS at the front door as well. Besides ensuring the visitor signs in, have them talk with newcomers; find out their interest, introduce them around, explain the squadron and the meeting, pass out some written material. Finally, a handshake and "Thank you for visiting. Hope you're here next week." FOLLOW UP with a phone call before the next meeting.

13. Recruit Parents. Parents can be a rich source of Senior Members. Their natural interest in the program due to their children's participation, make them an ideal audience. Make

parents feel welcome as soon as their cadets join. Fostering an early interest will lead to a lasting relationship. Encourage them to get involved with the unit. Make sure they know the commander (and his or her phone number) and parents of other cadets. A "Parent's Night" is a good way to do this. Provide a calendar of events. If it changes, tell them. Encourage them to always check times, dates, chaperones, etc. Make sure adult supervision is waiting for the cadets when parents are delivering a child to an activity.

14. Assign an experienced member to each new member. The experienced member can act as a mentor to the new member. This provides a familiar face and someone to answer questions. A sense of belonging is critical to retention and this is one of the best ways to do that.